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E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: KUWAIT MEDIA REACTION, MARCH 19: PRESIDENT BUSH'S
SPEECH/IRAQ DEADLINE; WAR PREPARATIONS IN KUWAIT

11. Summary: President Bush's call for Saddam Hussein and his sons to leave Iraq within 48 hours was echoed by Kuwait's National Assembly on March 18. Commentators point out that the President's ultimatum reflects the proposal of Oman's Sheikh Zayed for Saddam's exile, but that the time for that option has passed.

While there are reportedly no plans to close Kuwait International Airport, British Airways suspended all of its flights in and out of Kuwait on March 18.

Characterizations of military action against Iraq as a war of liberation "in order for the Iraqis to enjoy the wealth of its nation," share the opinion pages with opposition to such action. One commentator writes that US confidence does not guarantee success, and that the US could be drawn into a longer conflict, "similar to Israel's involvement in Lebanon." Regarding the implications for the UN, another writer opines: "the fate of the United Nations is similar to that of the League of Nations, not because [the UN] failed to deal with the Iraqi regime, but because Washington decided to overstep its bounds under pressure from Christian-Zionist radicals." End Summary.

12. News Stories: All papers report that Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, announced that Kuwait is ready to deal with all contingencies in the event of war. He stressed that Kuwait has ample supplies of gasoline, medicine, food and water.

On March 18, widely-read daily Al-Qabas reports that the Kuwaiti National Assembly called for Saddam to step down.

Al-Rai Al-Aam front-pages GCC Secretary General Al-Atiyyah's comment after his March 18 arrival in Kuwait that Saddam should "make a brave decision" and leave Iraq.

Al-Watan carried on its front page a statement by Kuwait Airways Director of Public Relations that there are no plans to close Kuwait International Airport in the event of war. All papers report that British Airways has halted its flights to and from Kuwait until further notice.

Al-Qabas front-pages the Kuwaiti National Guard announcement that it will deploy on Kuwait's streets and around vital installations and in residential areas.

Al-Qabas carries an exclusive two-page interview with Ambassador Richard Jones on March 19. Ambassador Jones said the conflict could begin at any time after 4:15 a.m. Thursday [Kuwait local time]- exactly 48 hours after the end of President Bush's speech.

The Ministry of Interior said that unidentified persons wrote graffiti against Kuwaiti State Security and slogans calling for "death to America" in the Quortuba district of Kuwait City, Al-Qabas reports.

Al-Rai Al-Aam reports that a former Russian General stated that the US has deployed nuclear weapons to Kuwait.

Editorials:

13. "The Zero Hour is Approaching"
Dr. Shamlan Al-Essa wrote in independent Al-Seyassah (3/19): "President Bush stressed that the goal of the war on Iraq is to liberate the Iraqi people from the tyrant Saddam in order for the Iraqis to enjoy the wealth and its nation. The US and its allies will definitely win this war. Therefore, we wish that Arab leaders would call on Saddam to convince him to step down from power to avert this destructive war."

14. "The Opportunity Which The Arabs Lost"
Faisal Al-Qanai wrote in independent Al-Seyassah (3/19): "There is no more chance for any peaceful solution, or any way

to stop the prospective war on Iraq after President Bush's address to the nation. President Bush's ultimatum is a translation of Shaikh Zayed's initiative [for Saddam to go into exile], which the Arabs ignored during their summit in Sharm El-Shaikh."

15. "The Fate of the League of Nations"

Ahmad Al-Daeen wrote in independent Al-Rai Al-Aam (3/19): "President Bush stated in his address: 'The Security Council did not carry out its responsibility, and that is why the US will take action.' This statement was not a warning to Saddam as much as it was to the United Nations. Today, the fate of the United Nations is similar to that of the League of Nations, not because [the UN] failed to deal with the Iraqi regime, but because Washington decided to overstep its bounds under pressure from Christian-Zionist radicals. The problem now is that there is no alternative to the superpower."

16. "Let us Hope for the Best"

Salah Al-Fadhli wrote in independent Al-Rai Al-Aam (3/19): "Preliminary indications show that America has the ability to make its plans succeed, but history has shown us that some things cannot be determined by force. America's entry and its involvement in Iraq may be similar to Israel's involvement in Lebanon. At this moment of time, we just pray to God that innocent people will not be harmed and let us hope for the best."

17. Whether the People Like it or Not"

Dr. Sami Nasser Khalifa wrote in independent Al-Rai Al-A'am (3/19): "Washington does not only want to dominate Iraq economically, but it is also striving to dominate the region surrounding Iraq like Syria, Iran, Saudi Arabia and the Gulf countries. To implement this strategy, the US Administration has to start in changing the Iraqi regime. [but] all the countries in the region are targets for the White House's greediness, whether the people like it or not."

JONES